



NIGERIAN WOMEN IN POLITICS: 24 YEARS AFTER THE RETURN TO ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

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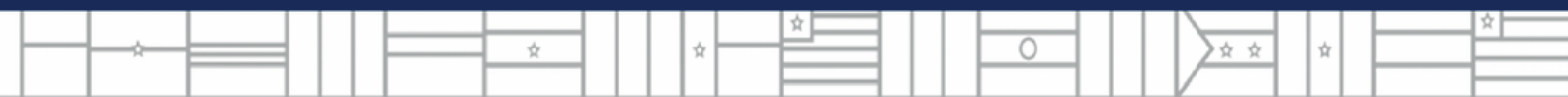


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Executive Summary

This paper discusses the underrepresentation of women in Nigerian politics since the country's transition to democracy in 1999. It highlights the complexity of the challenges that women politicians faced in the past and continue to face in contemporary times. The author submits that whether appointed or elected, women politicians in Nigeria continue to confront serious structural obstacles that hinder their participation and progress within the political landscape.

The paper sheds light on the structural dynamics of Nigeria's political parties, the legal framework governing the nation, and the pervasive influence of cultural and religious biases as major roadblocks for women in politics. Additionally, it scrutinizes the intricate relationship between gendered misinformation and its detrimental impact on women in politics. By providing specific critical examples which can stand as case studies, the paper elucidates the pervasive effects of misinformation on female politicians and underscores the urgent need for addressing this issue.

While acknowledging the significant challenges faced by women, the paper also celebrates pivotal milestones in the advancement of women's suffrage within Nigerian politics pointing to some of the women who paved the way for the contemporary generations of women to compete in politics.

By examining these various dimensions, this paper invites the reader to rethink the state of women in politics beyond tokenism. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding women's participation in Nigerian politics and underscores the importance of addressing systemic barriers to achieve gender equity and inclusivity in governance.

Introduction

Since Nigeria's return to electoral democracy in 1999, following a long period of coups and military rule, the democratic process of the country has not been without its own challenges, particularly regarding women's engagement in the political process (Hoffmann, Wallace, 2022). The last 24 years have not offered equal place to women and men in both elected and appointed political positions.

Women have encountered barriers that differ from those men face. Sometimes, they are subjected to unfair scrutiny and held to higher standards. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former Nigerian Minister of Finance, captures that reality eloquently when she submitted, “There is no right way to be a woman leader”(Gillard, Okonjo-Iweala, 2020). Since 1999, no Nigerian woman has been elected president, vice-president, or governor. Additionally, the number of seats occupied by women Senators, in each legislative session, has never gone above nine out of 109 seats. This low level of representation reflects the challenge that women still face in the country.

This paper discusses how Nigerian women have fared in both elected and appointed political positions 24 years after the return to democracy. It investigates the historical representation of women in political positions, as well as the issues women in politics face in career progression. The paper expatiates on issues including constitutional limitations, cultural and religious bias, gendered information disorder, party structure, male alignment, and the roles of women leaders in major parties.

Trailblazers of Women's Suffrage in Nigeria

The year 1949 is a reference point in the history of Nigerian women representation in politics. That year, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (Egba Alake Section), Amelia Osimosu (Egba Oke-Ona Section), Victoria Adetutu Soleyeye (Egba Owu Section) and Nusiratu Oduola (Egba Agura Section) made history as the first women to secure electoral seats in Nigeria winning positions in the Egba Central Council, in the Abeokuta Province (Agunbiade, 2022). This victory was a significant message in late colonial Nigeria that women would not take a back seat anymore.

Yet, the path to the symbolic victory of 1949 was marked by numerous obstacles. In Southern Nigeria, as early as 1944, women such as Oyinkan Ayobami, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo amongst others fought for the rights of women to vote. In 1944, Oyinkan Ayobami established the Nigerian Women's Party. By 1946 the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU), a protest movement that had been campaigning for women's suffrage, was led by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti aimed at achieving a franchise for women. The AWU was formed in response to a series of oppressive tax measures imposed by the Egba Native Authority. The organisation mobilised women to protest these taxes, which they perceived as unfair and discriminatory. The AWU's activism was instrumental in forcing the Native Authority to repeal the taxes in 1948. It also successfully lobbied the Egba Native Authority to grant women the right to vote in 1948, paving the way for women to participate in the 1949 elections and the eventual introduction of universal suffrage in Nigeria in 1951 with the introduction of the Macpherson Constitution (Agunbiade, 2020).

Despite the limitations of the Macpherson Constitution, women took part in the electoral system at the municipal level. In places like Lagos and Abeokuta Province, the Lagos Local Government Ordinance N.17 of 1950 provided an opening for women. This law, however, applied only to women from southern Nigeria. Their counterparts in the North were not included till after the Civil War in 1967.

While women from the south were given the liberty to contest and vote, women in the north were yet to receive the franchise, largely due to cultural and religious sentiments. While Premier of the Northern region, Sir Ahmadu Bello discarded the above as the reason and was quoted asserting that women from the region had not "reached the right stage for such a great innovation" (Ahmadu Bello 1962). Women such as Hajija Gambo Sawaba and Malama Ladi Shehu were at the forefront of the Northern women's emancipation and often felt the brunt of it (Agunbiade, 2021). Leaders like Hajija Gambo Sawaba, a female politician, were imprisoned multiple times for their advocacy and stance against women intimidation, child marriage amongst others (Newsnaira.net). Sawaba served 16 prison sentences in her lifetime and faced other precarious abuse such as the shaving of her hair and being stripped and flogged. Despite the persecutions, Sawaba remained unhinged in her desire for the liberation of the Northern woman. It wasn't until 1976 that Olusegun Obasanjo's military regime, through the Local Government No. 189 edict, gave all women the right to vote (Agunbiade, April 7, 2020).

Since the return to democracy in 1999, the representation of women in elected political positions has been far from impressive (Sogbesan, 2015). While women's interest in politics has increased, it has not translated into representation in Nigerian politics. The highest number of women representation in the Senate was achieved in 2007 with only nine women clinching seats out of the 109 available seats, while 2011 saw the highest number of women at the house of representatives with 26 out of 360 seats won by women.(Onyinyechi Eke, 2022) So far, Nigeria has witnessed 27 women Deputy Governors across its various administrations. Only one woman, Virginia Etiaba, has been governor in Nigeria, however she was not elected– thus meaning that no woman has been elected Governor till date (Adetayo, 2023).

In the build-up to the 2023 elections, there were 360 women vying for various Federal political positions in Nigeria. Only one woman vied for the position of President. 92 vied for Senatorial positions. 286 for House of Representatives, 25 for Governorship and 102 for Deputy Governors (Alabi, 2022).


Contemporary intra-party politics did not give a particular attention to women either.(INEC 2023) Even major political parties fail to give women a chance to contest in national elections. For example, in the 2023 general elections, only one woman was a presidential candidate: Ojei Princess Chichi who represented the Allied Peoples Movement (APM), = a minor political party. For the remaining key posts under contest, women were represented as follows: 0% for Vice President, 6% for Governor, 24% for deputy governor, 8% for Senate, 9% for House of Representatives, 10% for State House of Assembly. Trusting women within the party to run for a position could be a starting point (Oluyemi, 2016). But at this stage already women are absent. The following table sums up women representation in key elected positions since 1999:

Table 1: Nigerian women in key elected positions since 1999

Year	Senate	Total seats	House of Representative	Total seats	Governor	Total seats	Deputy Governor	Total seats	Vice president	Total seats	President	Total seats
1999	3	109	12	360	0	36	1	36	0	1	0	1
2003	4	109	21	360	0	36	2	36	0	1	0	1
2007	9	109	25	360	1	36	6	36	0	1	0	1
2011	7	109	26	360	0	36	3	36	0	1	0	1
2015	8	109	22	360	0	36	4	36	0	1	0	1
2019	8	109	13	360	0	36	3	36	0	1	0	1
2023	4	109	17	360	0	36	8	36	0	1	0	1

Created with Datawrapper

From the table above, 1999 marked the start of some gender representation in governance in Nigeria. The country had only 3 women senators out of 109 seats available, and 12 women in the 360-seat House of Representatives. Only one woman occupied the seat of a deputy governor. The positions of a Governor, Vice president, and President have never been conquered by a woman.



In 2003, a modest increase in women's participation in leadership positions was observed, excluding the positions of governors, vice president, and president. A landmark moment in 2007 saw Nigeria's first and only female governor take office, accompanied by a notable rise in women holding deputy governor and lawmaker positions. That year marked the nation's highest representation of women in governance. However, the subsequent electoral years of 2011, 2015, and 2019 brought a disheartening decline in women's representation across leadership roles. While 2023 records a slight improvement in the number of female deputy governors, women's overall presence in parliament remains alarmingly low.


What is Holding Nigerian Women Back?

Nigerian women have faced various recurring structural challenges in their attempt to be at par with their male counterparts in politics. The restrictions, which have been redefined over the years, have remained constant in categorisations, and cut across women whose intentions have been declared and those who already have party tickets. Those in major political parties take most of the burn. This section expands on the various challenges women have faced since the return to electoral democracy in 1999. Issues such as constitutional limitations, cultural and religious bias, gendered information disorder, party structure, male alignment, and the roles of women leaders in major parties are discussed in this section.

Nigerian Legal framework, Policies, and Women Participation in politics

In response to the need to address gender disparities in politics, Nigeria enacted the National Gender Policy (NGP) in line with the declaration made at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Ahmad, 2003). The NGP advocated for 30% affirmative action to promote women's participation in politics, aiming to rectify the gender imbalance and empower women to actively engage in decision-making processes (Ejekwonyilo, 2022). Despite the enactment of the NGP and the advocacy for increased women's participation in politics, progress has been limited, and women's representation in top positions of Nigerian governance remains alarmingly low (Nkereuwem, 2013). This stark reality highlights the pressing need for more effective measures and strategies to address the persistent barriers that hinder women's full participation in Nigerian politics. Unfortunately, women continue to be marginalised and relegated to supporting roles in politics (Amata, 2023).

Historically, Nigeria's constitutional development was not inclusive of women. The national gender policy has no legal framework as it is mostly a statement of intent. While there have been several bills and policies by women to enforce affirmative actions, these have been strongly opposed by male dominated law makers. In 2019, a bill sponsored by Ibrahim Sodiq for women's quota for all legislative positions was rapidly dismissed by the male dominated lawmakers (Agunbiade, 2020). In December 2021, Nigerian lawmakers for the second time rejected the gender and equal opportunity bills. Frivolous reasons such as the use of the word equality were cited by some lawmakers (Ikhenade, 2022). After so many protests by NGOs and civil society organisations, Nigerian lawmakers partially rescinded their decision. While this might be a welcome development, this is still a far cry from women's emancipation. The decision to rescind was based on three bills to grant citizenship to foreign-born husbands of Nigerian women and to give a woman the right to become indigenes of their husband's state after five years of marriage. The third provision was to assign 35 percent of legislative seats to women, as well as reserve 35 percent of political party leadership, for women (Adetayo & Egbejule, 2022).



The legal systems in Nigeria disadvantages women who seek to run for political positions. Laws and policies often prioritise the needs of men rather than fostering gender inclusivity (Allanana, 2013).

Laws and policies, rather than fostering gender inclusivity, tend to prioritize the needs of men, contributing to a systemic disadvantage for women in politics. The Nigerian legal system, customary laws, and cultural norms often prioritize the needs of men over women, perpetuating gender inequality and limiting the growth of women. Nigerian inheritance laws for example favour male heirs making it difficult for women to inherit property, wealth, and land therefore limiting women's financial independence (Olueze, 2021), (Eze, 2022). Nigerian customary laws and practices, such as child marriage, deprive girls of education and opportunities, hindering their participation in society. (McGovern et al., 2021)

In Nigeria, traditional cultural practices play a crucial role in a girl's enrolment in school, with the patriarchal system in rural areas dictating gender roles and often considering women as inferior to men, leading to gender inequality in education. (Nawrozzada, 2022) For instance, the perception that women are primarily responsible for domestic duties can make it challenging for them to take part in politics or aspire for leadership positions (George, 2019).

Cultural and Religious Bias

In Nigeria, the political landscape has consistently favoured male candidates, perpetuating narratives that present men as natural leaders and cast women as their submissive companions. Senator Aishatu Ahmed, popularly known as Binani was the most recent stride of hope for the first elected female Governor during the last general elections. Binani who ran under the umbrella of the ruling APC vied for the Governorship of Adamawa state and emerged as the party flag bearer under very stringent circumstances (Guardian Nigeria, 2023). Binani's legal battle with Nuhu Ribadu and other party members, while not inherently gender-based, underscores the tenacity required for women to navigate Nigeria's political landscape (Maishanu, 2023). Ribadu had earlier instituted a lawsuit at the High Court and prayed the court to order a fresh primary from which Binani would be excluded. The Court of Appeal sitting in Yola, the Adamawa State capital upheld her candidacy and ordered the electoral body to recognise her (Nation reporters, 2022). Despite the court ruling, Binani did not get the full support of all APC members with even certain people propagating the idea that a woman be deputy governor rather than a governor as part of ensuring gender equality. Nigeria's first lady, Aisha Buhari in addressing the crisis was quoted urging Northern leaders to "learn from the exemplary practice of their Southwest counterparts in appointing women as deputies in a gradual approach to obtaining gender inclusion in our polity"(Sobechi, 2022). She further explained that, "This is a most realistic step in our efforts at attaining gender justice instead of supporting the pursuit of the misplaced ambition of an individual do-or-die politician."

Aside from gender bias, Binani was also faced with religious persecution from clerics who opposed the idea of a woman being in leadership. This bias was expressed on social media, on broadcast stations and sometimes during Jumaat prayers, according to reports (Nabordo, 2023).


Several Twitter users had put up threads of posts alleging that Binani was going against the Prophet and the Hadith (Musa, 2023). While religious leaders in the state argue that leadership by a woman is forbidden according to the Quran, Binani's supporters argue in her favour that the Islamic system of government is different from the democratic system also acknowledging that the state is not a monolithic Muslim society, but a secular state where the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides the laws, as opposed the Quran. (Nabordo, 2023)

Aside from Binani, other female candidates like Funke Akindele have been strongly opposed for daring to be in politics. Funke Akindele was the running mate of Olajide Adediran (Jandor), who vied for Lagos governor under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (Erezi, 2022). Akindele was heavily scrutinised not for her achievements or political strides but for her marriage and family. Her divorce was steadily discussed on platforms as though she was seeking a marital role and not politics (#PulseHotTakes, 2022). Aside from her recent divorce, Akindele's ambition was not widely supported because she was an actress and comedian (Ripples Nigeria, 2022). This was distinct from Desmond Elliot, another popular actor who was actively supported in 2015 (Ogeny, 2015). One major factor promoting hate and discrimination against women in Nigeria is the blatant reluctance of law enforcement agencies to prosecute the perpetrators of such acts. In instances where culprits were arrested, the case often died natural deaths without giving the victims the justice they deserve.

Natasha Akpoti, a governorship candidate of Kogi state, witnessed her share of persecution for being a woman. Akpoti who contested under the PDP was physically assaulted and attacked on several occasions by political opponents. The assault was widely condemned leading to the then Inspector General of Police Usman Alikali Baba ordering an investigation into the incident (Oyewale, 2022). The findings are yet to be made public almost a year later.

Gendered Information disorder

In politics, the effects of information disorder are very dire as it affects not only a woman's political career but also her reputation and social standing. In Nigerian politics, misinformation occasionally delves into the private lives of female politicians, taking a disconcerting turn. Matters such as divorce and past relationships, which should inherently remain private, are sometimes exploited to divert attention from the substantive issues. Instead of highlighting their policies, qualifications, or political achievements, these women face unwarranted scrutiny and judgement based on their personal backgrounds.



The private life of Senator Aishatu Ahmed popularly known as Binani was on public display with false accusations sexual profligacy frequently deployed to tarnish her legacy. The former senator was accused of being a girlfriend to numerous politicians such as Festus Keyamo, former President Buhari, and Rotimi Amaechi (Twitter, 2023).


Deputy candidates such as Tonto Dikeh, Funke Akindele, and Princess Islamiyat Oyefus were also subjects of controversies. While the first two who are also actresses were judged based on their past relationships and marital status, the latter was described as a bad mother by an X (Twitter) user. This narrative was sparked by an image of a woman alleged to be Oyefus, the Labour Party Deputy Gubernatorial candidate smoking. This image which was fact-checked by numerous media agencies was also debunked by the party (Onoboh, 2023).

Gendered information disorder takes various forms such as sexualised contents of the victims, sexist and misogynistic content, and posting of doctored images and video's aimed at ridiculing based on their gender. This form of disinformation often relies on true, distorted, or emotional content that doesn't have a truth value. Gendered disinformation attacks or undermines people based on their gender, or weaponizes gendered narratives for political, social or economic objectives (Bpf Output Document, 2021).

Gendered disinformation aims to paint the picture that women are unfit for leadership. It portrays women nominated or assigned higher public offices as unfit (undeserving/incompetent) of leadership position. It also creates the notion that such women may have obtained such higher status through sexual acquaintances and not through their own merits. Consequently, this discourages other women that have witnessed such attacks on their fellow women from pursuing political careers or other higher positions. When queried many actors argue that these attacks are part of being in politics. They argue that any woman intending to join politics should have a thick skin as they would be scrutinised just like their male counterparts. However, are these critics similar? The answer is really no. While we agree that men politicians face criticism and scrutiny, we however can agree that the dynamics are different. Comparatively, a polygamous male would not be scrutinised through his family or even how he treats them but rather his previous work experiences.

Men as Allies: Rhetoric and Reality

There is a preconceived notion propagated by mainstream media pointing to men playing pivotal role in ensuring gender equality in Nigerian politics. There have been contentions that men have significantly influenced gender equality and representation in Nigerian politics. However, when examining the data, it becomes evident that women's representation can be seen more as a quota system rather than genuine representation. From 1999 to 2015, women made up only 20 percent of ministers and special advisers to presidents, averaged at 7 percent in legislative roles, and occupied just 3 percent of positions as local government chairs and members of the state house of assembly (Yusuf, 2020). Despite global initiatives like the "He for She" movement which aimed at engaging one billion men and boys in supporting gender equality, it has seen limited success in Nigeria.



During the 2022 APC convention, which aimed at reaching a consensus, the only female presidential candidate, Uju Ohanenye, stepped down in favour of Bola Tinubu's candidate. (Ajayi, 2022). However, during her candidacy, Ohanenye was notably a 'lone' female aspirant and has since been rewarded with a ministerial position in Tinubu's cabinet (Adeuyi, 2023). While Ohanenye's actions can be termed as a self-serving feminist publicity stunt, they reflect a known strategy among female politicians. Many aspiring women leaders seek the support of influential male politicians to achieve their political goals.

While we may query the roles of men in politics and their refusal to let go of power and control, we cannot absolve women of their involvement in maintaining the status quo. Ayisha Osori in her book “Love Does Not Win Elections” emphasised that while the desire to be in politics may be strong among women, one notable hurdle faced by women is the tendency for women to align themselves with strong male candidates, as they perceive that power and resources lie predominantly with men. Osori further explained that women in office grapple with accusations of neglect from other women who seek better gender representation (Osori, 2017). She put it this way, “Sometimes the politicians ask where the women were when the politician was looking for money for her forms, getting harassed by thugs, or fighting to regain their mandate. But more often than not, in a country where everything flows to the source of power, women who were serious about getting elected knew the power resided with men. In turn, women in the general population complained that women in office ‘do nothing for them’; while the women in office view those complaining with a mix of pity, disdain, and amusement.”

Party Structure's and Women Representation in Politics

Party politics plays a significant role in determining the emergence of candidates as flag bearers and appointees. Unfortunately, many political parties are reluctant to take a chance on ‘new’ and relatively ‘inexperienced’ candidates, particularly young women. This tendency to favour established candidates hinders the opportunities for capable and promising young individuals, especially women, to participate actively in politics and contribute their unique perspectives to the decision-making process.

The discussion about gender disparity often brings forth another argument centred around party structures. It is widely believed that the National Women's Leader was established primarily to meet gender quotas. Within Nigeria's political party framework, leadership positions are predominantly occupied by men, a trend attributed to the patriarchal nature of the country. By the start of the fourth Republic, Nigeria's two major Parties were the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Alliance for Democracy- All People's Party (AD-APP). While the PDP would create what can be called the ‘gender appeasing role’ in the position of the National Women's Leader, the AD-APP had no Leadership for the women (Afrikontakt, 2006). Consequently, other political parties embraced a similar structure to ensure women's representation in party leadership. However, this approach has genuinely secured no representation but merely created a position to be occupied by a woman.


This position unfortunately, holds no significant input or influence in the party.

A recent Premium Times report highlighted the perspectives of Banke Ilori-Oyeniya and Nafisa Atiku, who contend that smaller political parties offer greater representation to women in leadership positions compared to larger parties (Iruke, 2023). They argue that women within smaller parties have opportunities to progress alongside the party's growth, occupying more significant roles than their counterparts in larger parties. Examples that challenge this argument abound. Princess Chichi Ojei of the Allied Peoples Movement (APM) was the only female presidential candidate in the 2023 general elections. Her party nonetheless withdrew support for her less than 10 days before the presidential elections, Ojei was not from Nigeria's top political party (Olokor, 2023). Alfa Mohammed, the spokesperson of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), held a differing view. Mohammed suggested that women's willingness to invest effort plays a role, implying that their exclusion from party appointments could be due to their perceived lack of commitment.

Women representation in inter-party politics is determined more often by their financial contributions to the party vis-a-vis their ability to purchase exorbitant ticket fees that remain largely unaddressed. The issue of parity however is far-fetched as a woman National Chairman of a party is likely not to change the narrative. Instead, it might result in the utter scrapping of the 'gendered party position'. Thus, the issues surrounding Nigeria's political system go beyond discussions of nomination fee reduction but structural challenges.

In Nigeria's political landscape, the issue of political migration is prevalent, often referred to as "prostitution". In the case of women, they are forced to step down or are relegated to the background in elective positions; and in their quest for survival and recognition, they tend to migrate across political parties (Osiruemu, 2004). This move, although necessitated by unfavourable political arrangements, is translated to the woman's waywardness and indecision by "jumping" from one party to another. However, the trend is not limited to women. Prominent political figures engage in such party-hopping, eroding the significance of party loyalty and diluting the ideological foundation of the political system. For instance, the PDP presidential flag bearer for the just concluded presidential elections, Atiku Abubakar was a member of ANPP in 2003 and 2007 and then formed his own party the CPC in 2011 (Adibe, 2017). In 2015 he was a member of the APC and in 2019, a member of the PDP. While Atiku has the leverage of political migration and still being relevant due to his political history, this cannot be said for a woman.

Political parties often claim to address gender issues by creating women's wings and committees headed by a "woman leader" at both national and state levels, aiming to enhance women's representation within the party and in the broader political process (iKnow Politics, 2009). However, the effectiveness and success of this approach remain a subject of debate. While the person with the highest position in the land (president) is the leader of the party by default of his position, the same gesture is also extended to his wife who becomes the leader of the women's wing of the party. This is despite the party having a National Chairman and a National woman's leader.




While this arrangement is not expected to have adverse effects on the party's structure, the effects are a bit dicey within the women's wing. The following examples are illustrative in that regard. From 1999 to 2005, Iyom Josephine Anenih was the national women's leader of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (Wikipedia, 2010). Stella Obasanjo on the other hand was the wife of the president and the unofficial 'women's leader'. Stella Obasanjo was more prominent as the wife of the president, with campaigns such as the war against genital mutilation and childcare trust to her name. While Anenih might have been recorded as the first women's national leader, her influence within the party is questionable. The power tussle between the president and his deputy further reflected in the lives of their wives with each trying to outdo the other with pet projects. This might have overshadowed Anenih who had little press coverage or relevance aside from controversial situations such as her support for Sharia.

Anenih's position was more of a ceremonial position, than a working one, because party systems were being adopted after years of military rule and women oppression. By 2007, Maryam Inna Ciroma became the National Women's leader of the PDP. However, her influence in politics was widely based on her role as the Minister for Women's Affairs rather than her party leadership. At intervals, she was accused of trying to influence party leadership, one of which caused protests in her state Borno (Olaniyi, 2009). Kema Chikwe became the National Women's leader in 2012 up till the 2015 elections that ousted the PDP (Ekott, 2012). By the last elections, Stella Effah-Attoe was the PDP women's leader. She however decried being side-lined during the 2023 election campaigns (Ibrahim, October 19, 2022). A shared aspect among these women is their political affiliations through prior appointments or marital ties. However, none of them has achieved success in winning elected positions. While we sometimes attribute the position of women leader to a quota system, it is sometimes believed that the same can be said about the Ministry of Women's Affairs. However, there is a possibility that political appointees to these roles leverage them to get other visible political appointments.

Beta Edu, the National Women's Leader of Nigeria's governing party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), has captured the attention of women across the nation, with a prevailing belief that she could revolutionise the political landscape for women (Oyeleke, 2022). Edu holds the distinction of being the youngest individual appointed as a Special Adviser to the Executive Governor of Cross River State. Furthermore, she holds the accolade of being the youngest minister to serve in Nigeria's Federal Executive Council during the Nigerian Fourth Republic.

Edu's career trajectory bears semblance to that of Ciroma although her journey is influenced by the contemporary landscape, marked by the prevalence of digital communication. Yet, Edu faces challenges as well. Her accomplishments have not shielded her from criticism. Additionally, a fraction of women within her party have expressed a vote of no confidence in her leadership, further adding to the complexities she navigates (Oyeleke, 2022).



The current status and whereabouts of women party leaders vary. Some continue to be involved in various aspects of politics and public life while others have vanished from the limelight. Some may still hold leadership positions within their respective parties or have transitioned to other roles within the political arena. It is important to note that this information can change over time and may depend on specific developments within the parties and the broader political landscape.

Conclusion

The historical struggles of Nigerian women, such as the Egba Women's Union and subsequent movements, teach us about the persistent barriers to women's political empowerment in this country. Cultural and religious biases, gendered information disorder, and structural limitations within political parties remain significant challenges to date. Efforts to address gender disparities through policies like the National Gender Policy have yielded limited results, as entrenched patriarchal norms and resistance from male-dominated lawmakers continue to hinder progress toward women's total emancipation. The recent rejection of the gender and equal opportunity bills further emphasizes the ongoing struggle for gender equality in Nigerian politics.

While women have increasingly asserted themselves in politics, they still face discrimination and marginalization. The growing prevalence of gendered disinformation and the reluctance of law enforcement agencies to prosecute perpetrators further exacerbate these challenges. Despite the support of male allies and initiatives such as the "He for She" movement, women's representation in Nigerian politics remains tokenistic rather than substantive. The tendency for women to align themselves with influential male politicians highlights the unequal power dynamics within the political landscape.

Party structures also contribute to perpetuating gender disparities, as established candidates are often preferred over newer and less experienced individuals, particularly women. The creation of women's wings within political parties has not resulted in meaningful representation, with women's leadership roles often being marginalized or ceremonial at best.

Given these challenges, achieving gender equality in Nigerian politics requires concerted efforts to address systemic barriers and promote women's empowerment. This includes legislative reforms to ensure gender parity, targeted interventions to combat gendered disinformation, and initiatives to foster genuine male allies who actively support women's political participation. Only through collective action and sustained advocacy can Nigeria realize the promise of equal representation and participation for all its citizens.

While clamoring and advocating change is essential to address the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, a comprehensive strategy is key. This strategy would help create a framework for activists and advocates on steps and where focus should be given per season.

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ABOUT CDD

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